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Informer Appears Key to M.S. Case Against 6 Antiwar Veterans

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TALLAHASSEE, Fla., Aug. 13—The Government's case against six members of the Vietnam Veterans Against the War charged with plotting an assault on the Republican National Convention appears to rest primarily on the testimony of an informer for the Federal Bureau of Investigation who had established a reputation as one of the antiwar group's more militant and vociferous members.

The informer is William L. Lemmer, a 24-year-old ex-paratrooper who had been the organization's Arkansas-Oklahoma regional coordinator and who testified before a Congressional hearing that he had once been offered a psychiatric discharge from the Army.

Veterans who knew him, and Mr. Lemmer's estranged wife, Mary, say that he had a history of instability. The veterans say that he had frequently urged violent or disruptive acts on the group and that his activities had led to a number of arrests in the past.

The veterans contend that the conspiracy the Government describes did not exist. The Justice Department, as is the normal procedure, declined official comment on the case.

Tape Recordings of Lemmer

The veterans group says it has 14 hours of tape recordings in which Mr. Lemmer details his activities as an informer for the F.B.I. and tells of various weird plots and counterplots that he contends he was involved in. They also have three rambling letters written to Mrs. Lemmer, in which he vows vengeance on members of the group he blames for taking her away from him, and speaks of his grand jury testimony and other activities.

The recordings were made shortly after Mr. Lemmer had told some of his fellow veterans at the meeting in Gainesville that forms the heart of the overt acts in the indictment that he was working for the F.B.I. The Government has subpoenaed the tapes, but has not yet obtained them.

Mr. Lemmer, who is apparently under the custody of the F.B.I.—in one letter, he speaks of being in "protective hiding"—was not available for comment.

The indictments, handed up by a Federal grand jury here on July 13, charged six veterans, all in their 20's, with conspiring at a meeting in Gainesville, Fla., on May 26, 27 and 28 to disrupt the Republican National Convention, which is to be held in Miami Beach from Aug. 21 to 23. The six are: Scott Camil, John W. Kniffin, William J. Patterson, Peter P. Mahoney, Alton C. Foss and Donald P. Perdue.

The indictment charges that they conspired "to organize numerous 'fire teams' to attack with automatic weapons fire and incendiary devices police stations, police cars and stores in Miami Beach"; that the alleged conspirators "would fire lead weights, 'fried' marbles, ball bearings, 'cherry' bombs, and smoke bombs by means of wrist rocket slingshots and cross bows," and that they planned to "disrupt communications systems in Miami Beach."

The six veterans have not yet been arraigned. Last week, Judge David L. Middlebrooks of United States District Court ordered four other veterans back to jail for refusing to testify before the grand jury.

The progress of the case thus far bears a number of striking similarities to the Government's prosecution of the Rev. Philip F. Berrigan and six other antiwar activists on charges of conspiring to kidnap Henry A. Kissinger, Presidential adviser.

The case was brought by the same Justice Department official who supervised the Berrigan indictment, Guy L. Goodwin, chief of the Internal Security Division's Special Litigation section.

In both cases, the defendants belong to groups that have been innovative forces in the antiwar movement. Both groups charged that the indictments were attemps to discredit them.

In both cases, the indictments were brought quickly and both juries remained sitting after handing up the indictments. The Givernment said this was because the investigation was ongoing; the defense charged it was a "fishing expedition" to find and compel corroborative testimony.

And, in both cases, attention focused on the role of an informer: Boyd F. Douglas, a convict, in the Berrigan case, and Mr. Lemmer in the veterans case.

The Arkansas Traveler

William L. Lemmer, an F.B.I. informer, at an antiwar demonstration at the University of Arkansas.

Bill Lemmer, a pudgy man who has recently cut off the long hair and bushy beard favored by many of the antiwar veterans, enrolled at the University of Arkansas at Fayetteville last fall, following his discharge from the Army.

One of the first things he did when he came to town was to call Martin Jordan, the leader of the Fayetteville antiwar veterans group and say that he had met him at the group's big demonstration in Washington that spring.

"I said, 'Come on over, I'd like to talk to you,'" Mr. Jordan recalled, "because I wasn't there."

Wife Discusses Husband

Mr. Lemmer quickly became prominent in activities of the antiwar veterans at the university. He had an assertive quality that several veterans described as a "tremendous ego," which led him to tell boastful war stories and claim expertise in a number of fields.

In a long interview, after she had gone through a large pile of old letters kept in a tin box, his wife recounted her relationship with Mr. Lemmer, whom she had known since he was a senior and she was a sophomore at the same high school in Texarkana.

Mr. Lemmer was a popular youth who had held several class offices and was a serious student who attended the International Science Fair in 1967, she recalled. He attended Valparaiso University in Indiana for slightly over a semester, dropping out when a girl he was going with had a nervous breakdown, his wife said.

"That's the way he is," Mrs. Lemmer said. "Any time he

gets close to anything or anybody, it destroys them." She added that he was even unstable in just friendly relationships.

He joined the Army in March, 1968. As she traced his letters from basic training, advanced infantry, jump school and Special Forces training, she found a "gradual mental change," from "an intellectual status" to a more "every day, physical kind of thing."

In February, 1969, she said, he was sent to Vietnam with the 173d Airborne.

Drawings in Letters

Mr. Lemmer is an excellent artist, his wife noted with some pride, and many of the letters from the period are decorated with his drawings. There is a recurring sketch of a teddy bear, which, she said, he would draw with various expressions to illustrate his feelings.

He was sent home in February, 1970, on a long leave. But in July, she recalled, he was ordered back to Vietnam and they hurriedly got married. He left in August but was soon shipped back because of a severe asthma attack.

He was assigned to Fort Benning, Ga., and she dropped out of the University of Arkansas to join him. There, she says, he became involved in antiwar activities.

He went to Washington at the time of the veterans' protest in the spring of 1971, and appeared before a Congressional hearing. He presented a petition signed by 113 soldiers on the post protesting conditions and said that he had been harassed by military intelligence because of his antiwar activities.

In his testimony, reprinted in the Congressional Record, he says that "when they found out I was about to try and receive a legitimate medical discharge, they offered me a discharge on the grounds of psycychiatric disability and for some ungodly reason I never found out." The testimony is somewhat disjointed, but it appears from the context that this was before he had served in Vietnam.

Mrs. Lemmer recalled much of their married life as a succession of financial problems and complained that as her husband became more involved in antiwar activities she was always left at home while he attended meetings or traveled.

But, about last October, as she placed it, the financial problems seemed to ease, although she said he never told her why. He was able to fly to veterans meetings in Denver, Washington and other places. In January he bought a Dalmatian that he kept with him constantly, new clothes, and in May he traded in their old car on a Toyota sports car that, she recalled cost $3,847.

Indeed, it was largely Mr. Lemmer's ability to travel to various meetings, Mr. Jordan said, that persuaded him to step aside and let the newer man become the Arkansas coordinator of the group, a position he later expanded at a meeting in Denver to include Oklahoma.

But, there were things that, in retrospect, disturbed him about Mr. Lemmer, Mr. Jordan said.

"As long as I've been in the movement, I've never heard anyone speak of such radicalness," he said of Mr. Lemmer.

When the former Secretary of State, Dean Rusk, came to speak at the university, Mr. Jordan and other veterans said, Mr. Lemmer urged that they get lengths of chain and chain the door shut during the speech. The suggestion was voted down.

On another occasion, he recalled, he sat down at a table in the basement cafeteria of the Student Union building where Mr. Lemmer was talking to a group of other veterans about what he called a "positive action" at the Republican convention, then scheduled for San Diego.

"His plan was that we get automatic weapons, disassemble them and strap them to our bodies, then get into the convention and rip people off," Mr. Jordan said.

In affidavits filed in the Federal District Court here, Mr. Jordan and Donald C. Donner, another member of the Fayetteville veterans group, said that during their tape-recorded interrogation of Mr. Lemmer, he had told them that he had "counseled, aided and abetted" a teen-ager in a plan to blow up a campus landmark known as Old Main, teaching the youth how to make and place the bomb.

At midnight on last Oct. 15, F.B.I. agents and city policemen staked out inside and outside of the building captured Mark C. Vanciel, then 19, the son of a local minister, with a molotov cocktail. They found ether poured under the building's front door. He was sentenced to jail until his 21st birthday.

Barbara Stocking, a doctoral candidate and teaching fellow at Boston University, who worked for the veterans, met Mr. Lemmer at a peace demonstration in Washington last May. She accepted a ride to Florida with him.

Talked During Trip

He talked for "nearly the whole time" during the two-day trip, she said in an affidavit filed in the District Court here, and "he said that I should not go to the Miami conventions because, he said, all of the V.V.A.W. [Vietnam Veterans Against the War] leaders were going to be picked up and taken out of circulation."

The affidavit stated: "He and some other people were going to shoot leaders of the New Left, and start a riot, and there would be a lot of fighting and shooting, and everyone would be arrested. He said he had a source of unlimited funds to carry this out, and would go into hiding afterwards and leave the country."

"Whenever we stopped to eat along the way, "the affidavit went on," as soon as we were at a table or counter, he began talking in a loud voice about shooting, bombing, and the like. I asked him to stop, but he still did it. When we got to Gainesville and went to the house of Scott Camil, which was where he was going to stay, he again talked of shooting and bombing."

Mr. Jordan and some of the other veterans cited an incident late in the spring at Tinker Air Force Base near Oklahoma City. After an antiwar rally, 36 demonstrators were arrested on trespassing charges when they crossed onto base property.

In checking the court records, Eric Grove, lawyer for some of the defendants, discovered that Mr. Lemmer had been released on his own recognizance without the aid of a lawyer—a highly unusual procedure.

Later, in their affidavits, Mr. Jordan and Mr. Donner would say that Mr. Lemmer had told them during the tape-recorded questioning that he had managed to get his release through his F.B.I. control agent. At this time, Mrs. Lemmer said, her husband had called her from Oklahoma and instructed her to tell friends that she had borrowed the money to pay his bail.

Mr. Jordan said that when he learned of the incident, he called the antiwar veterans' national office, which, in turn, called Gainesville, Fla., where Mr. Lemmer was attending a meeting.

It was at this meeting, held in apartments rented in a ramshackle old frame house by Scott Camil and several other Gainesville veterans, that the Government contends the alleged plot was hatched and that the use of firebombs, slingshots and cross bows was demonstrated.

The veterans openly say that many of their members are armed. Mr. Camil also concedes that he has bought wrist-rocket slingshots—a weapon that uses steel balls for hunting small game and that is available in sporting goods stores here. The veterans say that at one point there was a plan to use the slingshots to the marshmallows at policemen in a "guerilla theater" action.

Democrats Called Topic

The veterans say that the meeting—a gathering of Southern regional leaders who met sporadically to discuss their problems in working in a more conservative area—was held to discuss plans for demonstrations at the Democratic, not the Republican, convention.

Some of the veterans say that Mr. Lemmer attempted to bring up the subject of the Republican convention, but was shouted down.

And, it was at this meeting, Mr. Camil and others said, that Mr. Lemmer took several people aside and for the first time told him that he had been an F.B.I. informer. He offered at the time to become a double agent.

Shortly thereafter, Mr. Jordan and Mr. Donner met with Mr. Lemmer for two tense days, resulting in the long tape recordings, which the Government has subpoenaed but not yet obtained.

One lawyer, not directly associated with the case, who has heard portions of the tapes described them as "hair-raising." He said he believed that Mr. Lemmer was "being used."

Meanwhile, relations between Mr. Lemmer and his wife were deteriorating. She would soon move out of their apartment, retain a divorce lawyer and, in mid-June, have him arrested and held for a sanity hearing.

Cites Threats and Weapons

In affidavits filed in the Fayetteville courthouse at that time, she said that he kept a loaded weapon with him, and that he had threatened her, her lawyer and several of the other veterans. The police confiscated a loaded .22-caliber pistol and a loaded .22-caliber automatic rifle from Mr. Lemmer.

Mr. Lemmer was released after being examined by a young general practitioner from the university, who recommended that he see a psychiatrist.

Since the break, Mrs. Lemmer has received three rambling letters from her husband, letters that abruptly shift in tone from pleading with her to come back to him, to bragging of his importance to the Government and of his grand jury testimony, to braggadocio and warnings of vengeance against Mr. Jordan and other veterans.

He says at one point that if he comes for them it will not be noisily, but in "tennis shoes" with a "length of piano wire," and says "I am not a goddammed leg infantryman like them. I am an élitist paratrooper, S. F. [Special Forces] ranger."

At another point he says: "If you must tell them anything, tell them to keep an eye over their shoulders at all times. Because one evening soon, they'll see the satisfying smile of mine."

But, Mrs. Lemmer also recalled returning to their apartment the day she left and finding the walls covered with artwork, including many of his war drawings, and a number of index cards stuck on the walls reading "P.V.S. [post-Vietnam syndrome] Kills."

"There was a drawing of a street lined with buildings," she said. "Everything concrete with no life except maybe one or two twigs of grass coming through the cracks. And in the middle was a little teddy bear, the teddy bear he used to draw with this funny look on its face, this dull look."